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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: INFORMATION ON LATIN AMERICAN DEFENSE
MINISTERS (C-AL5-01594)

REF: A. 05 STATE 232384
[1](#)B. ASUNCION PA IIR 6 875 0038 04

Classified By: PolOff Mark A. Stamilio, reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (U) The information that follows responds to INR/I Request for Information C-AL5-01594. Answers are keyed to ref A questions.

[1](#)A. (C) The principal impediment to making the Defense Minister more responsible for oversight of the military is the fact that the Defense Minister is not in the operational chain of command. The Military Forces Commander reports to the President as Commander in Chief. The Ministry of Defense is an ancillary political institution with responsibility for policy formulation, a variety of administrative support activities, and liaison with Congress, other Ministries, and foreign embassies. This lack of operational command authority over the military is the most important issue with which the Defense Minister currently is grappling. In 2004, the Minister of Defense and the Military Forces Commander developed a reorganization plan that would include the Defense Minister in the chain of command (ref B), but the plan has not cleared the lower house of Congress.

[1](#)B. (C) The Defense Minister serves as a reasonably effective intermediary between the military and civilian spheres. The military no longer plays an overt role in politics, and civilian authorities generally maintain effective control over the security forces. The Defense Minister's lack of operational command authority over the military (see sub-paragraph A, above) limits his/her effectiveness vis a vis the military, as does the fact that Defense Ministers typically lack previous military experience or other significant defense or national security experience. Conversely, lack of previous military experience likely increases the Defense Minister's effectiveness as an intermediary vis a vis the civilian sphere, in light of Paraguay's history of military dictatorships and coups in the not too distant past. Other factors, such as the Defense Minister's individual political and professional acumen or his/her relationship with the President and other power brokers (see sub-paragraphs C and D, below), likely have a greater impact on his/her effectiveness as an intermediary between the two spheres.

[1](#)C. (S/NF) The Defense Minister is extremely vulnerable to

corruption. Paraguay's Executive operates as a political machine controlled by the ruling party, and political favors and spoils go to those who are closest to the party's power brokers. Corruption also pervades the ranks of the military.

To make up for inadequate resources, but also primarily for personal enrichment, commanders engage in corrupt activities.

They exaggerate manning figures to secure more funding from the military budget, and use conscripts as a source of labor for non-government work in order to generate revenue. The military's inability to secure a budget that allows for operational capabilities sustainment leaves most units barely able to meet their budgetary requirements for infrastructure, utilities, and pay, leaving no money for fuel and munitions with which to train. As a result, bribery is often considered normal, acceptable behavior. Since commanders depend on the Defense Minister to provide administrative support and to lobby Congress, the President, and other Ministries on their behalf, the Defense Minister has a certain degree of leverage to extract a portion of commander's ill-gotten gains.

1D. (C) The Defense Minister's effectiveness is largely dependent on his/her relationship with the President, as is the case with the heads of all GOP Ministries. Paraguay's Executive operates as a political machine controlled by the ruling party, and political favors and spoils go to those who are closest to the party's power brokers, including the President. Within such as system, it is difficult, if not impossible, to be effective without the backing and confidence of the President. The current Defense Minister, Roberto Gonzalez, is a personal friend of the President and served as his campaign manager in the 2002-2003 primary and general elections.

1E. (C) The Defense Minister position has not, in recent

years, been a significant stepping stone to other political positions, including the Presidency. A series of "soldier Presidents" ruled Paraguay from 1939 to 1993, including General Alfredo Stroessner from 1954 to 1989, and his immediate successor, General Andres Rodriguez, from 1989 to 1993. However, none of the four Presidents since Rodriguez (Juan Carlos Wasmosy, Raul Cubas, Luis Gonzalez Macchi, or Nicanor Duarte Frutos) were career military or had significant defense or national security experience. The current Defense Minister, Roberto Gonzalez, recently acknowledged his interest in running for president of the ruling Colorado Party, which is a potential stepping stone to becoming President of the Republic; but presently he is not considered a serious contender for either post. (Note: Prior to becoming Defense Minister, Gonzalez briefly served as Duarte's Interior Minister, but left office in the wake of a scandal involving the smuggling of blank compact disks. He returned as Defense Minister four months later, most likely as a way to cleanse his political reputation and resume. When Duarte reportedly asked Gonzalez and other aspiring party presidents to resign from their posts so they could dedicate themselves to their respective campaigns, Gonzalez chose instead to give up or delay his aspirations. Since then, Duarte revealed that he intends to seek re-election as party president, and re-election as President of the Republic if the Constitution is amended to permit it. End Note.)

1F. (C) The Defense Minister is not a particularly important interlocutor for the United States. The Embassy deals with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and/or directly with the Military Forces on routine matters. Vice President Luis Castiglioni has become our principal interlocutor on high-priority national security and defense issues.

12. (U) POCs at Post are PolOff Mark Stamilio (StamilioMA2@state.sgov.gov) and DATT LTC Dennis Fiemeyer (difiedd@notes.dawn.dia.smil.mil).
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